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AUTHOR Nurmi, Jari-Erik
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ABSTRACT

A number of studies have shown that parent-child interaction influences the manner in which adolescents see their future. In an investigation designed to determine whether this influence varies according to the child's age and sex, 57 Finnish adolescents were interviewed at ages 11 and 15 about their hopes for the future. The internality, optimism, complexity of plans, and level of their realization were estimated from the answers. In addition, adolescents filled out questionnaires measuring the degree of parental control and amount of family discussion. Results showed an evident age and sex-related pattern in the influence of parent-child interaction on adolescents' future orientation. Parental control measured at age 11 decreased internality, optimism, and planning activities at ages 11 and 15, especially among girls. But parental control measured at age 15 did not influence adolescents' thinking. In contrast, family discussion, particularly at age 15, increased levels of optimism, planning, and realization. Two tables are appended. (Author/SKC)

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PARENT-CHILD INTERACTION AND ADOLESCENTS' FUTURE ORIENTATION: THE EFFECTS OF AGE AND SEX

Jari-Erik Nurmi[1]

University of Helsinki

Finland

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[1]Jari-Erik Nurmi, Department of Psychology, University of Helsinki. Fabianinkatu 28, 00100, Helsinki, Finland.

Abstract

A number of studies have shown that parent-child interaction influences how adolescents see their future. To investigate whether this influence varies according to the child's age and sex, 57 Finnish adolescents were interviewed twice about their hopes for the future, at the ages of 11 and 15. The internality, optimism, complexity of plans and level of their realization were estimated from the answers. In addition, adolescents also filled out questionnaires measuring the level of parental control and the amount of family discussion.

The results showed an evident age and sex-related pattern in the influence of parent-child interaction on adolescents' future orientation. Parental control measured at the age of 11 decreased internality, optimism, and planning activities at the ages of 11 and 15, especially among girls, whereas parental control measured at the age of 15 did not influence adolescents' thinking. In contrast, family discussion measured particularly at the age of 15 increased the levels of optimism, planning and realization at that age.

Introduction

A number of studies have shown that parent-child interaction influences how adolescents see their future.

However, previous studies have not taken into account that this influence may vary according to adolescents' age. For example, the role of parental control may be different at the ages of 10 and 15.

The possibility that the influence of parent-child interaction is different for boys and girls has not been considered in previous research either.

Aim

The extent to which the effects of parent-child interaction on adolescents' thinking about the future vary according to the child's age and sex.

Variables

The following variables were measured twice, at the ages of 11 and 15 (*longitudinal data*):

Thinking about the future

* internality
* optimism
* complexity of plans
* level of realization

Parent-child interaction

* level of parental control
* amount of family discussion

Participants

35 Finnish boys and 22 girls were interviewed twice, when they were 11 and 15 years old.

Interview

The adolescents were interviewed about their hopes and aims for the future. Whenever a specific hope or aim was mentioned, the participant was also asked:

* to indicate on a 4-point bipolar rating scale the extent to which the occurence of each hope depended on *internal* or *external* factors,
* to indicate on a 4-point bipolar rating scale the probability that the hope would be actualized, indicating *optimism* concerning the future,
* the extent to which he/she had *planned* the realization of the hope, and,
* the extent to which he/she had already carried out the plans (*realization*).

The *reliability* of the content analyses for the levels of planning and realization ranged from .77-.93.

Questionnaire

The participants also filled out a questionnaire in which:

* *The level of parental control* was measured by asking three questions concerning the extent to which parents control the peers of their children and the clothes their children buy and wear.
* *The amount of family discussion* was measured by asking five questions concerning the extent to which the family discusses different topics, e.g. the

adolescent's life, school-related issues, and the parents' life.

Estimated *reliability* using Cronbach alpha was .71 for parental control and .77 for family discussion.

Results

A high level of parental control at the age of 11 decreased *girls'* internality, optimism and planning activities at the ages of 11 and 15 (See Tables 1 and 2).

A high rate of family discussion at the age of 11 increased *girls'* optimism and planning at the age of 15 (Table 2).

A high rate of family discussion at the age of 15 increased both girls' and boys' optimism (Table 2)

A high rate of family discussion at the age of 15 increased *boys'* levels of planning and realization of their future plans (Table 2).

Parental control measured at the age of 15 was not related to adolescents' thinking at that age.

Conclusions

The effects of age and sex should be considered when the influence of parent-child interaction on adolescents' thinking is studied.

For example, parental control measured at the age of 11 decreased internality, optimism, and planning activities at the ages of 11 and 15, especially among girls, whereas parental control measured at the age of 15 did not influence adolescents' thinking.

In contrast, family discussion measured particularly at the age of 15 increased the levels of optimism, planning and realization at that age.

Parental control measured at the age of 11 influenced girls' thinking in particular, whereas family discussion measured at the age of 15 mainly affects boys orientation to the future.

Table 1. Correlations between Variables Measured at the Age of Eleven (11).

Parent-Child Interaction	Thinking about the Future (11)			
	Intern	Optim	Realiz	Plann
Control (11)				
Boys	-.09	-.02	.27^{+}	-.15
Girls	-.19	-.67***	-.55**	.04
Discussion (11)				
Boys	.17	.15	-.04	-.10
Girls	.11	.23	.19	.16

$^{+}$ $p < .09$

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

For boys, N=33-30

For girls, N=18

Table 2. Correlations between Parental Control and Family Discussion Measured at the Age of Eleven (11) and Fifteen (15) and Adolescents' Thinking about the Future Measured at the Age of Fifteen (15).

Parent-Child Interaction	Thinking about the Future (15)			
	Intern	Optim	Realiz	Plann
Control (11)				
Boys	.05	.21	-.23^{+}	-.05
Girls	-.47*	-.60**	.21	-.31^{+}
Discussion (11)				
Boys	.02	-.31*	.23^{+}	-.04
Girls	-.11	.35^{+}	.16	.43*
Control (15)				
Boys	-.22	.06	-.13	-.02
Girls	.04	.01	.05	.11
Discussion (15)				
Boys	.05	.59***	.37**	.50**
Girls	-.03	.49**	.19	.10

$^{+}$ $p < .09$ ** $p < .01$ For boys, N=35-31

* $p < .05$ *** $p < .001$ For girls, N=21-19